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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the relationships among ethnicity, age and inherent social dilemmas. The study examines selected dependent variables (economic and health indicators, social interaction, and life satisfaction items) in an effort to determine the extent to which different configurations of age, ethnicity and socioeconomic status produce varying levels of social interaction and well-being. The data presented were collected by the University of Southern California's Gerontology Center in its survey "Social and Cultural Contexts of Aging," sampling 1,269 Black, Mexican-American and Anglo residents of Los Angeles County aged 45 to 74. Analysis indicates that Blacks and Mexican Americans suffer a case of "double jeopardy" for the minority aged. The possibility that age may exert a leveling influence on ethnic variation over time is also suggested in the data. (Author/MPJ)

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SOCIAL INTERACTION, AGE, AND ETHNICITY: AN EXAMINATION OF THE "DOUBLE JEOPARDY" HYPOTHESIS

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The plight of the minority aged has been characterized by many as one of either "double jeopardy", "triple jeopardy", or "multiple hazards" (National Urban League, 1964; Jackson, 1967; 1971; National Council on Aging, 1972; Senate Special Committee on Aging, 1971). Lindsay, for example, noted that most of the minority aged "are less well educated, have less income, suffer most illnesses and earlier death, have poorer quality housing and less choice as the where they live and where they work, and in general have a less satisfying quality of life" (U.S. Senate Special Committee on Aging, 1971: VI). In recent years such disadvantages have shown no indication of improvement. Hill observes that "the situation of the aged Black, on the whole, has not improved significantly since 1960. Most of the disparties between Black and White elderly in relation to work history, income, education, health and housing conditions still remain" (Hill, 1971: 35).

The implications of "double jeopardy" for both social policy and social gerontological research are many. Goldstein has concluded that "the confounding influences of age and race make the economic situation of older Negro (family) units particularly bleak and warrant special attention to this segment of the aged population" (1971: 249). The U.S. Senate Special Committee on Aging agreed, arguing that if the characteristics of the minority aged are indeed different from the general population, social policy must be informed as to these differences and modified accordingly.[1]

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For social scientists with research interests in the field of social gerontology, the implications of this "double jeopardy" situation have been reflected in an increased concern with the methodological biases imposed by sample compostion and a consequent call for more cross-ethnic research (Jackson, 1971b; 1971c; Kalish, 1971; Kent, 1971b; 1971c; Ehrlich, 1973; and Ragan, 1973). Rather than continue to exclude minority aged from ongoing gerontological research on the assumption that there are no differences between Anglo and non-Anglo aged,[2] a growing number of social gerontologists have criticized prior research precisely for its failure to control for variables such as ethnicity, education, locale of residence, and SES (Reynolds and Kalish, 1974). By restricting sampling to populations of aging Anglos, the risk of compositional effects is greatly increased; "that is, the differential distribution of such social variables in various cohorts and age categories confounds interpretation of findings insofar as those variables may be related to the dependent variable of interest" (Douglas, Cleveland, and Maddox, 1974; p. 669, quoted in Reynolds and Kalish, 1974).

This perspective on social policy and its modification raises the issue of whether racial or ethnic identity alone constitutes sufficient basis for differential treatment. Some have suggested that, while differences among ethnic groups were frequently observed and incontestable, it was true too that "the aging individual be he White or Black is also subject to a variety of other influences which frequently cut across racial lines and mediate differences" (Kent and Hirsch, 1969: 2). The concern is one that ethnic identity alone may indeed be perceived to be enough basis for differential treatment as the National Urban League's

original statement on "double jeopardy" suggested it to be. In addition to obviating the search for differentials among persons within the same ethnic group, Kent and associates believed this view was oversimplified as it ignored the possibility that "the differences that derive from prior social class position, racial grouping, and environmental circumstances may be blurred by the decrements of age, the problems incident to the later years, and by the social and personal mechanisms developed to cope with them" (Hirsch, Kent, and Silverman, 1958: 10).

It may be, for example, that while the relative numbers of aged Blacks and Mexican Americans having good health and adequate income are less than those of Anglos, the percentage differences between young Blacks, Mexican Americans and Anglos are greater yet. In other words, if compared with minority respondents aged 40 or less, 45% more of like aged Anglo respondents earn more than $10000, but the same percentage difference among the over-65 year-olds was only 15%, a characterization of the minority aged as being in "double jeopardy" would be accurate but yet incomplete. For, in this case, in addition to the double jeopardy effect, one could also say that age seems to be exerting a certain leveling influence on the ethnic differences found among the younger earners.

It is with this latter perspective that Kent, for example, viewed the relative situations of the Black and Anglo aged. The "age as leveler" notion, however, has not been subjected to empirical scrutiny. Not too long before his untimely death, Kent himself complained that while there remained a hint that "age may be a great leveler with regard to both racial and social influences...," "we not only lack data but also lack the conceptual tools for adequate interpretation" (1971c: 49).

The rationale for the present paper derives specifically from the dual observations mentioned above; namely, the minority aged suffer from a situation of "double jeopardy" and, secondly, chronological age -- being a critically important measure of status -- may be operating in old age to level what were formerly large ethnic differences on a variety of socioeconomic and quality of life phenomena. The purpose of this paper is to examine selected dependent variables (ranging from economic and health indicators to social interaction and life satisfcation items) in an effort to determine the extent to which different configurations of age, ethnicity, and SES produce varying levels of social interaction and well-being.

METHODS

Data to be reported in this paper were collected as part of a larger survey of the "Social and Cultural Contexts of Aging" conducted by the University of Southern California's Gerontology Center. The study population for this research consisted of Los Angeles County Anglo, Black, and Mexican-American residents aged 45-74. Sampling was conducted with the specification of equal allocation of cases within the sample to nine age by ethnicity cells (three age strata--45 through 54, 55 through 64, and 65 through 74--times the three ethnic groups previously mentioned) with as close an equitable distribtion on SES as possible. The final sample of 1269 to emerge from the multi-staged area probability sample design used in this study is, with weighting, representative of Black, Mexican-American, and Anglo residents of Los Angeles County, aged 45-74. Table 1 presents the sample distribution.

-- Table 1 about here --

Although the present sample was not part of a longitudinal design which would ideally be necessary for proper analysis of the "leveling" properties of age, our design does facilitate at least an initial investigation of this issue as it specifies an equal allocation of cases into three age strata and three ethnic groups as well as an equal as realistically possible distribution on SES. Thus, while we cannot follow one birth cohort through time and determine whether increased age does level whatever ethnic variation that may exist, we can compare three different age strata and determine the extent of the ethnic variation within each stratum. If, then, the ethnic differences among the 65-74 year-olds were not as great as those among the 45-54 year-olds, there would be at least some indication that age exerts a leveling influence.

VARIABLES

The dependent variables chosen for this analysis include a series of social interaction items (e.g., frequency of interaction with family, friends, and relatives), perceived health, family income, and several measures of life satisfaction. The life satisfaction measures were derived from a factor analysis of a battery of eleven items selected primarily from the Philadelphia Geriatric Center Morale Scale (Lawton, 1975).[3] The varimax roatated factor matrix appears in Table 2.

-- Table 2 about here --

ANALYSIS

The analysis that follows is based upon a multivariate regression analysis in which ethnicity, sex, SES, and income were regressed against each of the dependent variables listed above. An analysis of the

standardized partial regression coefficients (beta weights) for the ethnicity variables will be performed in order to determine the relative impact of minority group status - holding constant the confounding effects of SES, income and sex - upon the dependent variables within each of the three age strata. Thus, if there does exist a situation of "double jeopardy" for the Black or Mexican American aged, this will be reflected by a negative beta weight for the dummied ethnicity variables in the older age stratum. However, if chronological age is exerting a "leveling" influence on prior ethnic differences (or, for that matter, on prior sex differences), this would be evidenced by a declining standardized partial regression coefficient between the ethnicity dummies and the dependent variable across the three age strata.

INCOME

The relationship between minority group status and income constitutes a clear case of double jeopardy. The data in Table 3 list the beta weights corresponding to the relationships between minority group status, sex, income and the dependent variables (income, perceived health, life satisfaction, and suicide) within the three age strata. The beta weights for both Mexican Americans and Blacks on the income variable were both negative and statistically significant ($p < .01$) across each of the age strata. For the older Black respondents, the B of -.298 indicates that even with SES and SEX held constant the Black aged report significantly lower incomes than the majority Anglo group. The same conclusion applies as well for the Mexican American Aged.

A different conclusion, however, is reached for older females relative to older males. Although the B for sex is a negative .120

(indicating the lower incomes of older females vis-a-vis older males and, hence, a case of double jeopardy), this figure is somewhat lower than the -.150 corresponding to the sex variable in the 55-64 year-old group, and certainly a substantial decline from the -.237 beta weight found among the 45-54 year-old respondents. Thus it is true that older females suffer double jeopardy on income relative to older males; yet, it is also true that the relative income situation of males and females in old age is relatively more equitable than it is for the younger respondents in the sample. Chronological age appears to "level" somewhat a formerly larger income differential that existed in the middle years between the sexes.

PERCEIVED HEALTH

In response to the question, "In general, would you say your health is very good, good, fair, poor, or very poor?", older Black respondents were significantly more likely to report poorer health than Anglo respondents even with the effects of income, SES and SEX controlled. The beta weight of -.187 (given in Table 3) is statistically significant with $p < .01$. At the lower ages, the effect of being Black was not a significant predictor of health. For Mexican American respondents, although more likely than Anglos at all ages to report poorer health, the effect of ethnicity was not statistically significant ($p > .10$). The data also indicate that sex is an important predictor of health beyond the age of sixty-five, with females more likely to report being in better health than male respondents.

LIFE SATISFACTION

The principal components analysis of the life satisfaction battery

produced two factors, labelled tranquility and optimism. The regression of ethnicity on each of these two factors produced some interesting results. On optimism, an analysis of beta weights supports the findings of others that the morale of the minority aged is generally lower than that of the White aged (Lipman, 1966; Youmans, 1963). The beta weights for 65-74 year-old Blacks and Mexican Americans were -.162 and -.342, respectively. Thus, in terms of life satisfaction as measured by optimism, a case of double jeopardy can be made for the minority aged.

Measuring life satisfaction by tranquility, however, a different conclusion emerges. Across all age groups in the present sample, the minority aged report greater levels of morale than the Anglo respondents. While the size of the beta weights decrease across age strata (indicating a leveling effect), the sign of the coefficients remain positive in all cases. This surprising finding may help to understand the confused state of the literature previously reported in the area of race and morale. It appears critically important to distinguish between the factors underlying life satisfaction and not confound these separate phenomena by simply adding affirmative responses across all variables as some have done (Clemente and Sauer, 1974).

A further measure of life satsifaction was included in the analysis, namely, a question asking "Have you ever considered taking you own life?"[4] The data in Table 1 indicate an "age as leveler" effect is present as the beta weights decline across age strata from over -.20 among the younger respondents to well under -.1 among the older group. The negative coefficients on this variable of suicide are indicative of a lesser preoccupation with suicide. The statistically significant negative coefficients given in the 45-54 year-old category suggest

that Anglo's, not Blacks or Mexican Americans, are more likely to entertain notions of suicide. This difference, however, declines across age strata as a greater proportion of older Anglos than younger Anglos respond they have "never" considered taking their own lives.

SOCIAL INTERACTION

Table four presents the results of the regression of ethnicity, sex, SES and income on four measures of social interaction: frequency of interaction with (a) children; (b) grandchildren; (c) relatives; and (d) friends, neighbors, and acquaintances. The standardized partial regression coefficients reported in Table four show that, on only one of these four measures (frequency of interaction with friends, neighbors and acquaintances), does a situation of "double jeopardy" emerge for the minority aged. The beta weights coefficients representing the effect of minority group status on the remaining three measures of social interaction decrease in magnitude across age strata but remain positive in each case. Thus, with respect to certain measures of social interaction, it appears that the minority aged are less likely to be socially isolated from family and kin and, hence, the characterization of double jeopardy would be inappropriate.

The extent of double jeopardy is limited to interaction with friends, neighbors, and acquaintances. Across the three age strata, both Mexican American and Black respondents report lower levels of interaction than Anglos. This differential <u>increases</u> across age strata, with the minority aged (65+) the most isolated. The beta weights increase from -.175 to -.279 for the Black respondents; the increase across age strata for the Mexican American respondents is from -.307 to -.510.

The presence of a leveling effect can be observed with the remaining three measures of social interaction. From Table 4, one can see that the beta weights corresponding to the relationship between ethnicity and frequency of interaction with children, grandchildren, and relatives both favor the minority respondents and generally decline across age strata (with the single exception of interaction with grandchildren among Mexican Americans, the smallest coefficients are found among the oldest age stratum). This leveling property of chronological age is most apparent with respect to interaction with relatives. On this variable, the standardized partial regression coefficients steadily decline across age strata, from .238 to .172 to .003 for Blacks and from .271 to .170 to .032 for Mexican Americans.

These data suggest the possibility that individuals seek, and generally find, a minimum level of social interaction. The need to maintain this minimum accepted level of interaction requires the individual seek new partners in their social exchange networks should death, for example, steal from them a spouse or relative. This phenomenon appears particularly salient for Anglo respondents whose interaction with children, grandchildren, and relatives is generally less than either Blacks or Mexican Americans. Viewing their interaction with "other people" like friends and neighbors as compensation for the lower levels of interaction with kin, it becomes clearer why the frequency of interaction of Anglos with their friends and neighbors is considerably greater than either Mexican Americans or Blacks.

SUMMARY

Utilizing data from a large (N=1200) multi-stage probability

sample of middle-aged and aged Blacks, Mexican Americans and Anglos living in Los Angeles County, the phenomenon of social participation with family, friends, and neighbors was analyzed to determine the degree and nature of any ethnic variation. It was found that there were differences among the three ethnic groups not only with respect to individual social interaction but also on variables like income, perceived health, consideration of suicide, tranquility, and optimism. In some cases, particularly on income and health, these differences constituted a case of "double jeopardy" for the minority aged.

But while double jeopardy was found to be an accurate characterization of the Black and Mexican American aged in our society, the possibility that age may exert a leveling influence on ethnic variation over time was also suggested by the data. Variables such as social interaction with children, grandchildren, and relatives as well as a variable measuring the respondent's past consideration of suicide all evidenced a certain decline across age strata in their correlation with minority group status. While cross-ethnic longitudinal research designs would be necessary to definitively explore the "age as leveler" hypothesis, the present analysis offers some support for the earlier work of Kent in this area. His perspective on the issue of the relationships among ethnicity, age, and social problems bears careful consideration:

> ...The problems older people face are very similar regardless of ethnic background. This is not to say that the same proportion of each group faces these problems; obviously they do not. The point, however, is that if we concentrate on the group rather than on the problem, we shall be treating symptoms rather than causes (Kent, 1971a: 26).

The warning of Kent refers to the presumption of those like the National Urban League that ethnic differences are alone sufficient to understand the personal and social situation of the aged. This presumption, argues Kent, ignores tremendous variation within ethnic categories (cf. Jackson, 1970; 1971a). Unless one appreciates this critical reality, to paraphrase Shibutani, much of human conduct in old age "will remain a source of wonderment" (1961: 431).

Table 1: Sample Composition by Age, Ethnicity and Socioeconomic Status

	Ethnicity						
	Black		Mexican-American		Anglo		Total
Age	Lower SES	Upper SES	Lower SES	Upper SES	Lower SES	Uprer SES	
45-54	83	51	81	65	57	80	417
55-64	91	44	98	51	52	83	419
65-74	102	42	112	42	48	87	433
Total	267	137	291	158	157	250	
	413		449		407		1269

Table 2: Varimax Rotated Factor Matrix of Life Satisfaction Items

		Tranquility	Optimism
1.	Do you have a lot to be sad about	.613	.243
2.	Do you feel that life isn't worth living	.420	.324
3.	Do you worry so much that you can't sleep	.664	.150
4.	Do you feel afraid	.476	.169
5.	Do you feel bored	.576	.208
6.	Do you feel lonely these days	.577	.217
7.	Do you get upset easily	.450	.134
8.	Do you feel that things keep getting worse as you get older	.381	.494
9.	Do you feel that you have as much pep as you did last year	.062	.307
10.	As you get older, do you feel less useful	.221	.697
11.	Do you feel that life is hard for you	.539	.440

Table 3: Income, Perceived Health, and Life Satisfaction (Standardized Partial Regression Coefficients) by Age, Ethnicity and Sex (Controlling for Income and SES)

DEPENDENT VARIABLES

Age	Predictor Variable	Income	Health	Tranquility	Optimism	Suicide
45-54	Black	***-.286	-.084	***.207	*.110	***-.200
	Mexican American	***-.208	-.053	***.192	-.021	***-.252
	Sex	***-.237	-.067	-.034	.037	.014
55-64	Black	***-.323	.042	.097	.086	-.051
	Mexican American	***-.200	-.083	.055	-.018	*-.116
	Sex	***-.150	.018	***-.171	--	---
65-75	Black	***-.298	***-.187	*.112	***-.162	-.071
	Mexican American	***-.205	-.058	.048	***-.342	---
	Sex	***-.120	***.160	*-.091	.075	.011

* Significant (p .10)

** Significant (p .05)

*** Significant (p. .01)

Table 4: Social Interaction (Standardized Partial Regression Coefficients) by Age, Ethnicity and Sex (controlling for Income and SES)

DEPENDENT VARIABLES

Age	Predictor Variable	Interaction with children	Interaction with grandchildren	Interaction with Relatives	Interaction with others
45-54	Black	.080	.085	***.282	***-.175
	Mexican American	***.262	*.145	***.271	***-.307
	Sex	.090	**.169	.073	-.081
55-64	Black	**.156	*.120	***.172	**-.129
	Mexican American	**.159	***.357	***.170	***-.340
	Sex	.051	***.200	*.088	*-.093
65-75	Black	.045	.006	.003	***-.279
	Mexican American	.075	***.243	.032	***-.510
	Sex	***.149	***.140	.064	**-.102

* (p .10)

** (p .05)

*** (p .01)

FOOTNOTES

[1]The example cited by the Special Committee on Aging concerns the phenomonon of decreased rates of longevity among minority groups. The Committee points out that, since proportionately fewer Blacks than Anglos live long enough to collect old age Social Security benefits, minimum age requirements for Blacks should be changed to reflect this reality.

[2]Some research actually has excluded Blacks not because Blacks are presumed to be similar to Anglos and, therefore, their inclusion would make no difference, but because Blacks are so <u>different</u> from Anglos that their inclusion would distort some anticipated findings. In a study of voting and age, for example, all non-Whites were excluded with the explanation that "known differences in the experiences of different generations of Negroes are so great that non-Whites are excluded from all data reported in this paper" (Glenn & Grimes, 1968: 565, FN. 9).

[3]The indices of tranquility and optimism were constructed by multiplying the factor score coefficient by the standardized score corresponding to the appropriate variable and summing the results of the operations across each of the eleven variables.

[4]The responses to the question ranged from "Yes, seriously" to "Yes, but not seriously" to "no".

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